

Q&A Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions about the Stephen Series®

■ Why is it called the Stephen Series?

It is named *Stephen* after one of the first persons commissioned by the Apostles to provide caring ministry (Acts 6). The word *Series* describes the sequence of steps a congregation follows to implement the lay caring ministry system commonly referred to as *Stephen Ministry*.

■ What is the meaning of the Stephen Series logo?



The broken person behind the cross symbolizes that we are all broken people. The person in front of the cross shows that it is only through the cross of Jesus that we can be made whole.

■ How long has Stephen Ministries St. Louis been in existence?

We were incorporated as a not-for-profit religious and educational organization in 1975.

■ Where are you located?

Our headquarters and staff of about 45 persons—clergy and lay—are based in St. Louis, Missouri.

■ How many congregations are involved in Stephen Ministry?

More than 10,000 congregations worldwide are enrolled in the Stephen Series, with about 400 new ones enrolling each year.

■ What size of congregations are involved?

Stephen Series congregations range in size from fewer than 100 to more than 10,000 members.

■ How many denominations are represented?

Congregations from more than 150 denominations are using the Stephen Series, including Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Churches of God, Assemblies of God, Nazarenes, Reformed, Evangelical Free, and many nondenominational churches.

■ How many countries are involved?

Most Stephen Series congregations are in the United States and Canada. There also are Stephen Series congregations in 21 other countries on six continents.

■ How does Stephen Ministry benefit pastors?

Stephen Ministry lifts much of the caregiving load from the shoulders of pastors, multiplies the amount of care congregations can provide, and frees pastors to focus on ministry areas that only pastors can do. Pastors report great joy in seeing many more people receiving quality Christian care than they alone could ever reach. Many pastors also find deep satisfaction in “equipping the saints for ministry” (Ephesians 4:12).

■ How does Stephen Ministry affect existing ministries in the congregation?

Stephen Ministry complements and strengthens other ministries. When pastors, deacons, shepherds, group leaders, and other caregivers encounter people who need more focused, sustained, one-to-one care than they have time to provide, they can refer those persons to Stephen Ministry. In addition, many congregations use all or portions of Stephen Minister training to enhance the skills of their other caregivers.

■ What is enrollment?

Enrollment enables us to enter into a long-term relationship with congregations to help them succeed in Stephen Ministry. Congregations pay a one-time fee (there are no annual dues after that) and receive many benefits, including:

- a complete, step-by-step system for establishing a lay caring ministry that works and lasts;
- continued access to high-quality training and resources; and
- ongoing consultation and support.

Enrollment is a one-time investment that pays lifelong dividends.

■ When should our congregation enroll?

We encourage congregations to enroll at least two to three months before sending people to a Leader’s Training Course (LTC). This allows plenty of time to plan and register for the LTC. However, you can enroll anytime—even right up to the LTC. The longer you wait, though, the greater the chance that housing at the LTC may be filled. If you think you are likely to enroll a month or less before the LTC, call us as soon as you can to alert us of your plans.

■ Who are Stephen Leaders?

Stephen Leaders are the pastors, church staff, and lay leaders who direct Stephen Ministry in their congregation. They receive their training at a one-week Leader's Training Course (LTC) where they learn how to build support for Stephen Ministry; recruit, select, and train Stephen Ministers; find people in need of care and match them with Stephen Ministers; provide Stephen Ministers with regular supervision; and much more.

■ What do LTC conference fees cover?

Conference fees cover all training sessions; lodging; nine meals, including two banquets; beverage breaks; the shipping, setup, and distribution of about 20 tons of equipment and supplies; and other overhead and administrative expenses.

■ Who should attend a Leader's Training Course?

You will want to select Stephen Leaders with gifts or skills in areas such as leadership, teaching, and administration and who have a heart for caring ministry. Most congregations begin with 2–4 Stephen Leaders, including a pastor. You can send more people to LTCs, as needed, in future years. A strong leadership team is important for a strong, healthy Stephen Ministry.

■ How important is it that the pastor attend a Leader's Training Course?

Pastors consistently tell us how beneficial they found the LTC because it helped them fully understand key ways they can keep Stephen Ministry going strong through vision-casting and identifying people who need care. Even if lay Stephen Leaders will handle most of the day-to-day operation of a congregation's Stephen Ministry, it is helpful for the pastor to attend the LTC. The stronger a congregation's Stephen Ministry is, the more the pastor will benefit from it.

■ How long does Stephen Ministry last?

It is designed to be a lasting ministry, which is why many churches now have had Stephen Ministry going strong for 15, 20, 25, or more years.

■ Do Stephen Ministers attend an LTC?

No, LTCs are for Stephen *Leaders*. Stephen *Ministers* are trained *in the congregation* by their Stephen Leaders. (Some Stephen Ministers may later go to an LTC to become Stephen Leaders.)

■ Who are Stephen Ministers?

Stephen Ministers are lay people who receive 50 hours of Christian caregiving training in the congregation. Stephen Ministers typically have one care receiver at a time and meet with that person once a week for about an hour. In addition, they gather with their Stephen Leaders twice a month for supervision and continuing education.

■ What types of situations are Stephen Ministers trained to handle?

Stephen Ministers give one-to-one Christian care to individuals who are facing a wide variety of crises or life challenges, including people who are grieving, divorced or separated, terminally ill, unemployed, hospitalized, homebound, lonely or discouraged, experiencing spiritual struggles, and more.

■ Are there times that a Stephen Minister should not be assigned?

Yes. Stephen Ministers work with individuals, not couples or families. In addition, Stephen Ministers are *lay caregivers*, not therapists or counselors, so they do not work in situations that require the skills of a helping professional. Part of their training is in recognizing when a person's needs exceed what is appropriate for Stephen Ministry and knowing when and how to refer those persons to a professional caregiver.

■ How many Stephen Ministers should a congregation have?

This varies widely with a congregation's size and the needs for care that exist. Some congregations may have as few as five or six Stephen Ministers. Others may have 40, 50, 60, or even 80 or more. Start by asking, "How many people in our congregation and community need the kind of care Stephen Ministers are trained to provide?"

■ Will lay people make the commitment to train and serve as a Stephen Minister?

For more than 450,000 Stephen Ministers in thousands of congregations since 1975, the answer has been a resounding YES! Congregations tell us that lay people enthusiastically commit to 50 hours of training, weekly visits with care receivers, and twice-monthly supervision. In addition, many Stephen Ministers continue to serve well beyond their initial two-year commitment.